

Suggested Remarks
Gerardo Porta, USAID/OEDG
Forum: Bringing Perpetrators of Enforced
Disappearance to Justice
Sulo Hotel, Quezon City
September 4, 2008, 9:00 a.m.

Distinguished guests, colleagues in
development, friends, ladies and gentlemen;

Magandang umaga sa inyong lahat.

Thank you very much for inviting me to this
Forum on Bringing Perpetrators of Enforced
Disappearance to Justice. I am honored to
be with all of you today to help open this
important event.

The promotion and protection of human rights
is an important issue in the Philippines.
Compounding the problem is the general sense
of impunity for the perpetrators.

Impunity is at the heart of the problem. Regardless of state policy condemning extralegal killings and enforced disappearances, perpetrators will continue to violate human rights if nobody is caught, convicted and punished for their grave misdeeds. In the end, the best deterrent to human rights violations is the fair and full enforcement of the law. An environment where the risk of detection and punishment is high will make would-be perpetrators think twice and hopefully desist from carrying out extralegal killings and enforced disappearances.

The U.S. Government acknowledges the efforts of the Government of the Philippines, particularly the leadership demonstrated by the Supreme Court, to address human rights violations. But we also recognize that the Philippines' capacity to prosecute, convict and punish violators is hampered by a range of factors that include: overloaded judges

and prosecutors with limited training in handling human rights cases, weak investigative skills, lack of evidence, and the lack or unwillingness of witnesses to come forward.

It is with these factors in mind that the United States Government, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), together with our grantee, The Asia Foundation (TAF), is supporting a comprehensive program to change the culture of impunity by helping build capacity for better investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of cases.

We hope that this activity and the victory in July this year of the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND) in securing the conviction of a human rights violator will augur the end to the culture of impunity.

In closing, let me just reiterate how pleased we are to have supported this activity through TAF. We look forward to FIND's continued vigorous participation in upholding human rights in the Philippines.

Maraming salamat at mabuhay tayong lahat.